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SUBJECT: CANADA LOOKING FOR NEW APPROACHES TO
DEMOCRATIZATION

Classified By: Acting PolCouns Keith Mines, reasons, 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Recognizing the need to better organize Canada's institutions to promote democratic development abroad, the Canadian Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development recently conducted a study of democracy promotion. The committee's report was issued in July and the government is currently debating its response. The core recommendation is for the development of an expansive National Endowment for Democracy-style organization which would centralize democracy promotion programs and endow them with generous funding. While the Harper government continues to place democracy promotion at the center of its agenda, because of funding constraints and a fear of being spread too thin, it appears set to reject this proposal and continue with an enhanced "business as usual" approach unless the PM himself intervenes. There will be a huge missed opportunity for Canada to take a larger leadership role in democracy promotion if this new approach is not embraced. End Summary

THE IMPETUS

¶2. (SBU) Poloff met recently with DFAIT Democracy Unit Manager Ben Rowswell to discuss the Parliamentary report on democracy development (Advancing Canada's Role in International Support for Democratic Development), which was issued in July. The government's response to the report is due in early November. As background, Rowswell said Canada recognized that all democracies were involved in democracy promotion in the 1990's, with the U.S. taking by far the most robust approach. For its part, Canada empowered the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to administer democracy promotion programs on the margins, accepting the fairly serious limitations to what the organization could deliver given its cultural predilection to grassroots economic development and delivery of humanitarian assistance.

¶3. (SBU) In 1996 democracy promotion received a slight boost when the GOC issued a white paper that stressed the importance of human rights, good governance, and democracy in support of economic development, which has always been the core of Canada's overseas programming. Rowswell said even for those who interpreted this as a new mandate, however, it was nearly impossible -- given the nature of Canada's aid delivery -- to distinguish how much money was going to democratization and whether or not it was effective. There was a belief in some circles that democratization was getting short changed but not a clear course correction. One minor effort to try a new approach came under the Martin government in 2004 when the GOC tried to get more Canadians involved in the world through Canada Corps, a program like the Peace

Corps that offered opportunities for Canadians to take on a variety of roles promoting good governance and economic development overseas. In the end, however, the project failed to deliver in a systematic way and was absorbed into CIDA as the Office of Democratic Governance.

THE REPORT

¶4. (SBU) The Harper government came to office determined to place human rights protection and democracy promotion at the center of its foreign policy but it was also determined to focus on a few functional and geographic areas and not be spread too thin. Former FM Peter MacKay believed that for democracy promotion to be effective it had to get beyond government-to-government programs and empower contact between private organizations of the kind that the U.S. promotes through NDI, IRI and others. Parliament, meanwhile, was interested in exploring new options, and Parliamentary Secretary Peter Van Loan convinced the Committee on Foreign

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Affairs and International Development to conduct an inventory of how Canada conducts democracy promotion and make recommendations on how to do it better. Through the winter of 2007 the committee held 66 hearings and meetings and made eight overseas visits, including to Washington.

¶5. (SBU) The Committee's report, which was prepared by the Conservative members, was issued in July with full support from the Liberals but dissenting opinions from the NDP and Bloc Quebecois.

¶6. (SBU) Key judgments of the report are:

-- A broad definition of democracy, acknowledging that it

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goes beyond civil and political rights to encompass economic and social rights as well.

-- Frustration at CIDA's inability to identify how much it spends on democracy and what results it has achieved.

-- Acknowledgment that the challenges to democracy vary greatly from country to country and Canada needs to excel in generating and applying knowledge about democratic development to be effective.

-- A positive review of the Democracy Council, an informal body created and led by DFAIT that coordinates democratic development organizations.

THE PROPOSALS

¶7. (SBU) There are also three key proposals in the report. First, is for the development of a new independent institute -- the "Canada Foundation for International Democratic Development" -- which would have the mandate and funding to deliver programs in the field. The impetus for this foundation was analytical work done by Les Campbell, a Canadian democracy promotion specialist who left Canada to become NDI's Middle East Program director because of a lack of funding and focus here. He issued a number of papers and directed conferences in 2005 and 2006 that proposed the development of a Democracy Canada organization, modeled after the National Endowment for Democracy -- well-funded and with independence. Campbell, who is affiliated with the NDP, was supported in his work by former Liberal FM Tom Axworthy and Mulroney advisor Ross Reed (a Newfoundland Tory) so their proposal had bipartisan credentials.

¶8. (SBU) The Committee's report recommends that the foundation be established by an Act of Parliament, have multi-year generous funding, and include representatives of Canada's democratic institutions and political parties. It

is modeled after the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy.

¶9. (SBU) The second key proposal is for a new research center that would provide policymakers and practitioners with better information to inform their work and decision-making. And the third proposal is for a political party institute along the lines of the Dutch Institute for Multiparty Democracy. This would help to channel the personnel and experience of Canadian political parties into overseas democracy promotion, but in a multi-party system that breaks down party affiliation.

THE CRITICS

¶10. (SBU) The report was attacked by both the NDP and the Bloc, who wrote extensive dissenting opinions. The NDP took issue with the conclusions on ideological grounds - before Canada embarks on a new venture to be a "world leader in democratic development," they want it to first "demonstrate its commitment to the full range of political, economic, and social rights without which effective democratic development cannot occur." Canada, the NPD averred, should first hit the world standard of .7 percent of GDP devoted to "the basic economic and social rights of the world's poorest populations." The Bloc Quebecois also raised a series of objections, at the heart of which is an aversion to overseas political intervention, along with the apparent fear that one of its Quebec-based foundations -- Rights and Democracy -- would have its funding cut. It also criticized the unspecified nature of the committee's recommendations and the centralization of programs that it proposes.

THE RESPONSE

¶11. (C/NF) The government must respond to the report by November 7. It is embroiled at present in cabinet discussions, which are being informed by the Democracy Unit of DFAIT. Much to the chagrin of Rowswell, a career Foreign Qof DFAIT. Much to the chagrin of Rowswell, a career Foreign Service officer who has spent time on leave from Foreign Affairs to engage in democracy promotion in Iraq and elsewhere, the proposal may be completely watered down in cabinet and the most important new proposals scrapped. He has been directed to prepare a brief with three options. First, is to put greater emphasis on the current structure, a cost neutral option that Bernier supports. Bernier is a libertarian and is skeptical of big-government programs, no less abroad than at home. Second, is to work through the political parties to fill gaps in CIDA's current capabilities. And the third is to launch a feasibility study on how to implement the committee's full program with the various new organizations. Rowswell said the brief he sent

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to cabinet recommends the first option but he is hoping that all three options make it to the final discussions because he believes the Prime Minister could rescue the third option if he sees it. Without Qs intervention, Rowswell believes the opportunity to push forward this more expansive agenda will be lost.

¶12. (C) Comment: After months of anticipation and the release of a very good report with recommendations that could go a long way to getting Canada more involved in democracy promotion it is a bit of a let down to consider that this opportunity may be lost. It is still possible that the Prime Minister could intervene and reject the weak options or that the business as usual approach will be rejected by Parliament. But with so much on the government's plate right now -- Afghanistan, a possible election, and shaping a platform that would appeal to mainstream middle class voters -- this could be the kind of issue that simply gets lost in the shuffle. Still it may be worth a mention by senior officials who meet with their Canadian counterparts, keeping

in mind that the new Latin America policy was developed largely at our behest.

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